

## **CLACKAMAS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

### **Staff Presentation Worksheet**

Presentation Date: April 20, 2010                      Time: 11:00 am                      Length: 30 minutes

Presentation Title: Proposed reduction of permits lobby service hours for the DSB

Department: Transportation and Development

Presenters: Cam Gilmour and Scott Caufield

#### **POLICY QUESTION**

Given present staffing levels in the Building Codes Division, should the BCC authorize a reduction of open-to-the-public service hours in the Development Services permitting lobby?

#### **ISSUE & BACKGROUND**

The Clackamas County permits lobby is open to the public from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday through Thursday. Almost 30,000 people (29,987) visited the lobby in 2007; by 2009 that number dropped by almost half to 16,549.

Applications for all major permit types are received in the lobby, including building, plumbing, electrical, and manufactured homes. Additionally, applications for other permitting functions are processed in this lobby, including land use actions, grading permits and septic permits for on-site waste disposal. A significant number of citizens also visit the lobby to ask questions, seek information and receive guidance from county staff related to development projects.

Since 2009, the demand for permits has plummeted. As a result, the Building Codes Division staffing has also plummeted, from 47 to 21 FTE. Only four of the remaining 21 employees have both the skills and the necessary State of Oregon certifications to perform plan reviews, provide field inspections and staff the public service lobby counter. These four people must balance their time in all three of those service areas, without detracting from other work needed for the public.

Each station within the public service lobby requires one or more people to staff it and provide relief during the current 11 hours of operation each day. At our present staff levels, it is impossible to provide this coverage without compromising the amount of time devoted to other needed tasks. This is particularly true at the Building Codes Division intake desk where permit applications are reviewed for completeness and applications are evaluated against the Tri-County application criteria.

DTD proposes reducing the hours the lobby is open to the public to 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday through Thursday. Doing so will provide the remaining staff in Building Codes and other divisions with the focused time needed to perform plan reviews, return telephone calls and process certain types of permits and applications without interruption. This focused time will also ensure that the prior day's work can be processed in the morning and that, in the late afternoon, preparations can be made for the next working day.

Reduced service hours are not unusual in this economic climate and Clackamas County will not be unique if this proposed change is approved. Multnomah County and the cities of Portland, West Linn, and Newberg, among others, have all reduced their open-to-the-public service hours due to changes in staffing levels. Lane County has reduced its hours to 9:00 am to 1:00 pm Monday through Friday for a total of 20 hours open to the public each week. Clackamas County's hours (28) will exceed that even with the proposed reduction in hours.

To be clear, the proposal is to reduce only the permitting lobby hours. There is no plan at this time to alter the open-to-the-public hours of the Development Services Building. Other departments and divisions, such as WES and the Surveyor's Office, will continue to offer the same service hours they have done since the DSB opened in November 2008. Customers whose needs involve only those county functions will be able to access those departments and obtain those services without interruption.

In an effort to further minimize customer inconvenience, a drop center will be created in the main lobby on the first floor of the DSB. The drop center will allow customers who are simply dropping off materials in response to plan review letters and other communications to do so when the permits lobby is closed.

Customers will continue to be able to purchase most electrical, plumbing and residential mechanical permits by fax, online through QuickPermits.com, through Velocity Hall (a proprietary permits vendor) and through the mail during the time the permits lobby is closed. Additionally, a self-help center will be created which will allow customers to obtain brochures, pamphlets, applications and other informational materials as they would in the permits lobby.

Finally, staff will be able to make appointments with customers, at their discretion, during those hours the permits lobby is closed, as we anticipate that there may be occasions where special needs and circumstances require such meetings. These meetings would take place within the DSB but outside the permits lobby.

DTD plans to provide direct mail notifications to groups whose members will most likely be affected such as the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Portland and the National Electrical Contractors Association. Additionally, DTD will enlist the help of PGA to get the word out to the general public and will advertise extensively prior to the effective date, which we suggest to be June 1, 2010.

This matter has been discussed extensively with all managers whose functions are affected by the proposal, at DTD Senior Staff, as well as with the Development Liaison and Lobby Committees and other internal groups. These groups recognize and understand the need to alter lobby hours for an indefinite period of time in an effort to serve all of our customers effectively. Water Environment Services has also been involved in the discussion and feels it would benefit from the lobby closure, as its Soils Section faces similar staffing issues.

#### **QUESTION(S) PRESENTED FOR CONSIDERATION**

1. Should the BCC authorize the reduction of the lobby hours of operation in an effort to accommodate current staffing levels in the Building Codes and other Divisions effective June 1, 2010?
2. Should the BCC leave the hours as they are now, recognizing that there will be regular occasions where staff levels will be insufficient to cover all stations in the lobby (i.e. Building Codes and Soils)?

**OPTIONS AVAILABLE**

1. Reduce the lobby service hours from the present hours of operation (7:00 am through 6:00 pm) to new operating hours of 9:00 am through 4:00 pm.
2. Keep the lobby hours as they are presently and staff only those stations where a sufficient number of employees exist to provide services.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Staff respectfully recommends adjusting the lobby service hours for the Development Service Permits Lobby from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday through Thursday, beginning June 1, 2010.

**SUBMITTED BY:**

Division Director/Head Approval \_\_\_\_\_  
Department Director/Head Approval *Ken Gilman*  
County Administrator Approval \_\_\_\_\_

For information on this issue or copies of attachments, please contact Scott Caufield at 503-742-4747